

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 25, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden,

We write in strong support of your “Build Back Better” recovery plan to address our nation’s infrastructure, specifically the water infrastructure provisions. Too many families across the country have lost access to clean and safe drinking water in their homes in recent years. Our nation’s crumbling and outdated water infrastructure is in a state of emergency, leaving the most vulnerable Americans struggling with water access and unaffordable rates. Federal investment in public water infrastructure projects has dwindled from 63% in 1977 to just 9% in 2014, and it is essential that we make a major federal investment to renovate our old, lead-ridden water pipes and end our water affordability crisis.

As champions of water justice in Congress, we urge you to include provisions of H.R.1352- the *Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity and Reliability (WATER) Act*-in your upcoming infrastructure package.¹ The WATER Act is a comprehensive approach to address the looming water crises facing communities across the country, from the water outages in Texas last month to the ongoing affordability and infrastructure crisis in my state of Michigan. This bicameral bill is cosponsored by 75 Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and is endorsed by over 450 diverse organizations including labor, water rights, and social justice groups.

Your “Build Back Better” plan outlines many critical goals that we are working to address in Congress. We commend your decision to “create millions of good, union jobs rebuilding America’s crumbling infrastructure,” including our water systems. By “ensuring clean, safe drinking water is a right in all communities – rural to urban, rich and poor” and “investing in the repair of water pipelines and sewer systems, replacement of lead service pipes, upgrade of treatment plants, and integration of efficiency and water quality monitoring technologies,” we

¹ United States, Congress, “The Water Affordability, Transparency, Equity, and Reliability Act of 2021.” *Congress.gov*. [www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1352?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22hr1352%22%7D](https://www.congress.gov/bills/117/congress/house-bills/1352?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%22hr1352%22%7D).

can move towards achieving environmental equity and significantly improve the lives of millions of Americans.

For more than a decade, the United States has been experiencing a massive water infrastructure problem, including the Flint Water Crisis, miles of dangerous lead pipes in our communities, and now, water inaccessibility in Mississippi. Both our nation's drinking and wastewater infrastructure have received shockingly low grades by the American Society of Civil Engineers, with drinking water receiving a C-, and wastewater infrastructure receiving a D+. ^{2,3} The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that raw sewage overflows at least 23,000 times annually and more than 2 million Americans do not have running water, wastewater systems, or basic indoor plumbing in their homes. ^{4,5} The EPA recently assessed that approximately 9.3 million U.S. homes receive their water supply through lead pipes. ⁶

To address these issues, we have introduced the WATER Act to provide dedicated annual support to:

- Fully fund the Drinking Water and Clean Water State Revolving Funds (SRF);
- Provide funding for public schools to test and replace drinking water infrastructure;
- Provide grants to replace lead service lines serving households;
- Increase funding to construct, repair, and service household drinking water wells; and
- Increase funding to Native American governments for water infrastructure.

This legislation will ensure that American workers have access to fair jobs as our communities collectively work to improve our nation's infrastructure. To that effect, it would create an estimated 700,000 to 945,000 jobs across the economy, require the use of U.S.-made iron and steel, apply prevailing wage laws to all projects, and encourage union labor. Provisions of this legislation would help remove lead from drinking water at home and in schools, expand a grant program to replace all lead piping and plumbing in public schools, and provide grants to homeowners to replace lead service lines on their property. As our nation recovers from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and begins a path to recovery, bolstering our economy and ensuring American's have access to good paying jobs will be more critical than ever.

² "Water Infrastructure: ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card." ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card |, 8 Mar. 2021, infrastructurereportcard.org/cat-item/drinking-water/.

³ "Wastewater Infrastructure: ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card." ASCE's 2021 Infrastructure Report Card |, 3 Mar. 2021, infrastructurereportcard.org/cat-item/wastewater/.

⁴ "Closing the Water Access Gap in the United States: A National Action Plan." *Close the Water Gap*, Dig Deep and U.S. Water Alliance, 20 Mar. 2020, closethewatergap.org/#.

⁵ "Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs)." EPA, Environmental Protection Agency, 14 Aug. 2020, www.epa.gov/npdes/sanitary-sewer-overflows-ssos.

⁶ "National Primary Drinking Water Regulations: Lead and Copper Rule Revisions." Regulations.gov, www.regulations.gov/document/EPA-HQ-OW-2017-0300-0003.

Like you, we believe that our nation has a duty to correct historic injustices that have left disadvantaged communities, including communities of color, to deal with significant health risks. Not only must we ensure that these communities have access to clean water and adequate funding to repair water infrastructure, special attention should be given to replacing and remediating lead service lines in child care centers and schools to ensure that the most vulnerable among us have access to safe drinking water.

Our nation needs significant investments in its water infrastructure to ensure that all Americans have access to one of the most essential human needs. We are optimistic that under your leadership, we can move forward with a comprehensive plan that will address the most pressing water issues by providing robust funding for water infrastructure, ensuring our children are safe in their schools, and that all Americans have access to affordable, safe, and clean drinking water.

As you work to address resilient infrastructure while combatting historic environmental injustice, we urge you to include provisions of the WATER Act as you formulate your agenda. Thank you for your full and fair consideration of this request consistent with applicable statutes and regulations. We look forward to working with your administration in service of the American people and their right to safe, clean drinking water.

Sincerely,



Brenda L. Lawrence
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress

Gwen Moore
Member of Congress

Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Thomas R. Suozzi
Member of Congress

Nanette Diaz Barragán
Member of Congress

Mondaire Jones
Member of Congress

Marie Newman
Member of Congress

Eleanor Holmes Norton
Member of Congress

Ayanna Pressley
Member of Congress

Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

André Carson
Member of Congress

Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress

Jared Huffman
Member of Congress

Jerrold Nadler
Member of Congress

Mike Doyle
Member of Congress

Alan Lowenthal
Member of Congress

Debbie Wasserman Schultz
Member of Congress

Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress

Jan Schakowsky
Member of Congress

Mark Pocan
Member of Congress

Steve Cohen
Member of Congress

Bonnie Watson Coleman
Member of Congress

Adriano Espaillat
Member of Congress

Peter Welch
Member of Congress

Bobby L. Rush
Member of Congress